THE COUNTRY DOCTOR.*

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Ladies and Gentlemen,—Possibly it was a kindly regard for my health that prompted the officers of your Society to extend to me an invitation to address you this evening. They may have been thinking with a certain Western poet that

> "When a fellow has a story that he thinks he ought to tell,
> If he does not get to tell it, why, of course, he don't feel well."

I alone from the large faculty of this College can look back upon ten years of life as a country doctor. But it is not the story of that decade—not my own story—that I propose to tell you. Rather, it is that of my brothers and comrades, men whose lives I have been watching, lo! these many years.

My personal experience might teach you less than that of others, since I had the good fortune to succeed to an established practice, and so missed the heart-breaking wait and the long up-hill struggle that marks the earlier periods of many a doctor's life.

The theme you have given me is one that might well arouse to eloquence even a member of the silent profession. As when the sun in early morning tips with radiance the trodden snow, so could I wish for the white light of potent words with which to bring out the lights and shadows of that high vocation to which the country doctor is called; but, conscious of the greatness of my subject, and of my own limitations, I ask in advance your indulgent consideration, recalling the words of that old professor of rhetoric who, to a student before him for trial, said, "Sir, your time is five minutes—your subject the immortality of the soul." How shall we begin the study of the country doctor? The painter, the poet and the novelist can aid us, and for a few minutes I may accept their aid, but in the main I must try to portray him for you as I have seen and known him, off guard and in his own environment.

We may ask the poet about our subject, and from England, with apologies to Kipling, comes this answer:

> "As I was goin' 'ome to bed, through a muddy, country lane,
> I seen a man in a oilskin cape, atrudgin' through the rain,
> 'E 'adn't a match, an' 's pipe was out, an' I ses to im, 'Oo are you?'
> An' 'e ses, 'I'm a doctor, the country doctor, surgeon an' midwife too!'
> Now 'e never gets paid for 'arf 'e does, an' 'e does the work of two,
> An' 'e isn't one of the gentlefolks, an' 'e ain't like me nor you,
> E's a sort of a bloomin' chameleotype, surgeon an' midwife too.

*An address first given to the students of Trinity Medical College in 1899 and repeated by request before the Medical Society of the University of Toronto, Dec. 1907.

"An' I seen 'im again with a knife an' things, and the sweat was on 'is brow,
'E was trying to mend the cuts of a bloke as 'ad spiked 'isself in a row;
'Twas late at night, an' 'e 'adn't no light, to see what 'e 'ad to do,
An' 'is pal was a doctor, a country doctor, surgeon an' midwife too.
'E 'adn't got far with 'is little job, 'e wasn't but 'alfway through,
When the bloke sits up and asks for a drink, the same as it might be you;
Ho! they ain't no special anesthetutes, surgeon and midwife too."

Certain also of your own poets can tell us of him; none better than Dr. Drummond.

"But dere's one man got bees han's full
T'roo ev'ry kind of wedder,
An' he's never sure of not'ing but work and work away;
Dat's de man dey call de doctor, w'en you ketch him on the countree
An' he's only man I know me don't got no holiday."

The novelist will tell us of William Maclure, and as we read our heads are bowed in thankfulness to *der liebe Gott* for men of that heroic type whom here in our own land we know and love.

"The Guardian Angel" by Holmes, and "The Country Doctor" by Sarah Orne Jewett, give us splendid types, and not less worthy of study is the physician whose life history comes out in the series of books written by one who hides her identity behind the pen-name of "A Commuter's Wife."

You have all seen copies of Luke Fildes' noble picture, "The Doctor."

"On one side stands the world destroyer,—Death,
And on the other, oh most piteous strife!
An infant with a rosebud look and breath,
A baby fighting for its little life."

As I look at it every day, I can find no words to describe the central figure more fitting than those of the Quaker poet:

"A face that a child would climb to kiss,
Strong and manly, and brave, and just,
That men may honor, and women trust."

Well might Sir Mitchell Banks exclaim, "The men that look like that man, whatever be their business or trade or profession, whatever be their wealth or their social position, I say of such men is the kingdom of Heaven."

A country doctor is a perfected and evoluted medical student. Now you know just what a medical student is—at least you think you do, and from your standpoint perhaps you do. From the standpoint of your teachers, he is a rough, warm-hearted, generous, brainy fellow, with energies to be directed, and with boundless possibilities for future usefulness. From the standpoint of a city

policeman he is one shade darker than a Nihilist, while from that of a little girl out home—well, you gentlemen who come here with mortgaged affections, know what he is to her. On two points regarding him all will agree. He quickly sees through sham and pretence, and (outside the class-room) he is never at a loss for a timely answer. Let me illustrate this point:

In the earlier history of our College, there were students here, who, being the sons of ministers, felt it their duty to be a little wild in order to restore the balance. It is told of one of these gentlemen that once when "his jag was heavy upon him" he dropped to sleep in a barber's chair. When the knight of the razor said to him, "If you don't hold up your head, I can't shave you," the reply came quickly, "Then cut my hair."

And you remember when that church down street took fire and the students all turned out to see it, one of them stated the case in two words, "Holy smoke!"

From raw material [illegible] is the country doctor in our day and generation is evolved. [illegible] the millers, we manufacture some for home consumption, [illegible] grind" the rest in bond for export.

Probably the first physician, surgeon and accoucheur who ever engaged in country practice was the father of our race, Adam Primus. A photograph, the negative of which has unfortunately been lost, represents him giving catnip tea to little Abel, while his wife, Eve, suffering from a sick headache, binds up her throbbing temples with a fig-leaf handkerchief. Ever since Eden was lost the three most constant and universal demands of humanity have been water, food, a doctor.

Now, all who are graduated from our Colleges cannot be surgeons and live in cities. It takes ten thousand people to support a surgeon, while with one thousand a physician can live and save money. Besides, to get a living practice in a city takes about eight years, in a town, four, and in a village only one or two.

Scene First.—And so it comes about that the curtain rises on our graduate as he hangs out his shingle at the cross-roads, and hires a front and a bed room for himself and a stall for his horse. While he is waiting for calls, we will consider his environment and his preparation for the life he is to lead. Around him stretches the country as God made it and as man is trying to improve it. The roads he will soon learn to follow in the dark, as yet know nothing of the improvements suggested by the late Mr. Macadam. They curve and wander in search of the easiest grades, and at times they end in squirrel tracks that run up the trees. The forest primeval borders the clearing on each farm lot, and the houses are of frame or log. Scattered here and there are little villages like the one in which he has located "houses clustering like chicks around the motherly church roof," as Lowell happily puts it. He may have a dozen of such hamlets within what is to be his sphere of influence.

His college text-books are his library, a hand satchel is ample for all his instruments, while a shelf or two contains his slender stock of drugs. The money saved from school teaching was just enough to get him through the council, so from his father's farm a horse is spared, or one is bought on a slow note with paternal backing. This steed is not apt to be one that will get up an epidemic of paralysis among those who watch him travel. At first a saddle is bought, later a buckboard and cutter have to be procured. A buggy only puts in an appearance when some of the rocks are off the road, and another kind begin to pile up in the doctor's pocket, replacing the vacuum he has so long harbored there.

Scene Second, two years later.—The first novelty of caring for sick folk has worn off, and our doctor is winning his way to the confidence of the community, but of late into his life a new and strange unrest has come. His first diagnosis of his own disease is, "A subacute nostalgia." Very soon the symptoms point in quite another direction. It is not his old home he is longing for, but the new one he is to build. The lights that gleam across the snow from happy firesides make him feel more and more his isolation. His boarding-house loses its attractiveness, and about this time he begins to make certain calls that do not go down on his visiting list. At first he seeks excuse for these, but later he is somehow expected, and he is too thoroughly a gentleman to disappoint a lady. Before very long someone goes driving with him, and sits tucked up in the cutter while he makes his visits. The most widely spread of all maladies is upon him. You gentlemen, who study vital statistics, are well aware that more fall in love than in war. But the doctor does not fall in love. He walks right in with his eyes open, guided by that instrument of precision, the heart. He does not circle around and backpedal on his affections till all social and monetary advantages are fully considered. He does not need to, for right here his professional advantages show to good account. Lawyers see the worst side of humanity, ministers the best side, while physicians see it just as it is. With his special knowledge of all the girls in the country, and his common sense, it would require positive genius to make a blunder. He makes no mistake, and the very best girl of them all is the one who has by this time agreed to call him "George" instead of "Doctor." With womanly intuition she reads him through and through, and knowing full well that it is a terrible endorsation of a man to marry him, when he speaks she answers as a maiden in the land of the Dakotahs answered Hiawatha, "I will follow you, my husband!" To the physician, overtaxed in mind and body, struggling for his daily bread, and weighed down with the awful responsibilities of his calling, a gentle, loving wife is the greatest of all good gifts. To all fair things she will lend a fairer charm, and from the home she will help him to create will come the purity, the hope and the courage with which from this time on he

fights the battle of life. To her will be justly due a full half of his success, and far more than that proportion of all the happiness of his life.

Scene Third, ten years later.—And now our doctor is an established and prosperous man. Long ago his new house was built, and if not the best, it is apt to be the most tasteful in the village. You see, he consulted his wife when it was planned. Sancho Panza said, "Women don't know anything, but that man is a fool who don't take their advice." He owns a farm on the Fourth Concession, is Chairman of the School Board, Reeve of the Township, and an Elder in the Church. His political convictions are strong, and his influence widely felt. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, or the Hon. Mr. Whitney—I forget which—has his allegiance, and the party has no better or cleaner adherent. He is known and loved, and trusted and overworked, and pitied by all.

Perhaps he has a few enemies—just enough to enable him to escape the Biblical warning, "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you." His reputation has outrun the limits of an ordinary practice, many have urged him to move into the county town, and he has long thought of doing so. But still he stays, waiting till he can meet with someone into whose keeping he can commit the care of his people, those to whom he has given the best years and the best energies of his life. Before we leave him, let us look at the manner of man he is growing to be. Granting that the personal equation is the chief factor in the result, greater than any help or hindrance, it is still true that the silent forces of his calling, those that ride with him over all roads, that sit with him at all bedsides, that are with him in his downlying and his uprising—all these work upon mind, and heart, and body, making him day by day a better man or a worse one. He is not perfect. To be perfect, an ideal doctor, he would need to have the wisdom of Solomon, the patience of Job, the strength of Samson, the bravery of Joshua, the eloquence of Paul, the meekness of Moses, the faithfulness of Abraham, the charity of Dorcas, and the executive ability of Jezebel. He would have to hunt like Nimrod, fish like Peter, climb like Zaccheus, and drive like Jehu. He would have to keep clear of the gout of Asa, the melancholia of Saul, the gastric infelicity of Timothy, and would still fall short of perfection if he had not the tireless perseverance of the devil himself. Still, he is worth our study, for in scattered settlements over all this greater half of the continent you will find his counterpart, and to some of you gentlemen it will soon be given to live a life like his, and work out a similar destiny.

What of that life, its mirth and its misery, its hopes and its aspirations, its disappointments and its rewards? First, above all, it is a life of unconscious bravery, of devotion to duty, and of the sacrifice of self for the good of others. On what higher plane can any life be lived? "It is only," wrote Goethe, "with self-

renunciation that we begin to live." He may not preach the truth, but he lives it, and that is a thousand times better. Perhaps he is not the most regular of church-goers, but

> "He who serves his brother's needs,
> Whose prayers are spelled in loving deeds,
> May trust the Lord will count his beads
> As well as human fingers."

The very nature of his work lifts him towards the ideal. Do I claim too much for it in saying that it is the real spirit of Christianity in action?

> "It knows no meaner strife,
> Than art's long conflict with the foes of life."

Ruskin teaches us the dignity of service, Dickens the divinity of kindness, George Eliot the supremacy of duty, Browning the splendid optimism that comes from unfaltering trust in God, and Lowell the need to give ourselves to others if we would truly help them. All these we find mingled in and making up the life of the ideal country doctor.

If to live and labor and suffer for others, rising above self and selfish ends, is to live truly, then, reverently be it said, he is following with a guidance that he dares not claim, in the footsteps of the one Physician who knew all the truth, and who was and is our Lord and our Divine Exemplar. "Ever since from lips that spake as never man spake came the blessed words that gave to sightless eyes a vision of the blessed sunlight, to ears that had known no sound, the music of birds and of the human voice, that restored strength to withered limbs, and brought back life itself to a frame it had forsaken, the healing art has been Christlike and holy." Its charities may be, and often are, of that diviner quality taught by Him who gave himself for others.

The bravery his calling develops is that rare quality which Napoleon called "Two-o'clock-in-the-morning courage." It is an easy thing to be brave before a cloud of witnesses, but not so easy when the fight is a losing one and God alone is watching the struggle. Fire broke out one night in a city tenement, and in an upper window a child was seen. Quickly the ladders were run up, and a fireman mounted to save her, but before he reached the top the flames and smoke were upon him. He hesitated and began to drop back. Then one in the crowd cried, "Cheer him!" and from the multitude went up a shout that told of sympathy with him and the life to be saved or lost. Once more he dashed at the flame, went through it, and came back with the little one safe in his arms. No such encouragement comes to the physician, when in some lonely tenement at night he receives his baptism of fire; but from that trial he comes forth in stronger, purer manhood, and never after

doubts but that he is divinely ordained to be a minister of help, of comfort, and of consolation unto those who are appointed to suffer. It will be his to "scatter the charities that soothe and bless and save." The devotion to duty that guides him now is the selfsame principle that moved the ten thousand at Marathon, and the three hundred at Thermopylæ, that steadied the thin, red line at Inkerman, that rode into the valley with the Light Brigade, that rushed the trenches of Cronje at Paardeberg, and that gave to us Canadians the heroic memories of Wolfe, of Brock, and of the Jesuit martyrs at the North Shore Huron missions. I could tell you of one who with a lung half solid with pneumonia struggled through night and sleet to be with a patient and guard her from the dangers that threatened in the hour of her motherhood's advent, and of others who charged the banks of snow on blocked and drifted roads, as a soldier might charge a rampart, and whom nothing could stop or even stay when duty called. But why should I? We all know that Canada has many Grenfells and Maclures, but so far few Ian Maclarens to tell of their deeds of quiet heroism. Perhaps it is best so! Our profession would be the last to claim any monopoly of the manly qualities developed upon the campus.

"The sands of the desert are sodden red,
Red with the wreck of a square that broke,
The Maxims jammed and the Colonel dead,
And the regiment blind with dust and smoke;
The river of death has brimmed its banks,
And England's far and Honor,—a name.
But the voice of a school-boy rallies the ranks,
'Play up! Play up! and play the game.'"

The country doctor is no quitter. He plays the game, not simply while the light lasts, but through all the hours of darkness till the shadows flee away and hope revives.

He is the best friend a community can have. He is the confidant of lovers, and helps to make up their quarrels. He brings together again the husband and wife whom differences have separated. He is father confessor to half the country and keeps his trust with knightly honour. His sympathy is deep and genuine, and is not worn upon his coat sleeve. No one more than himself feels contempt for a "gusher" in or out of his profession. In every calling you find them.

After a consultation an old Quaker lady once said, "Thee will do me the favor not to bring that man again; thee knows I don't like to have my feelings poulticed." Legal persons

"Trained in every art
To make the worse appear the better part,"

use sympathy at $100 per day to sway juries. Clergymen sometimes overuse it. An evangelist at one time got into the habit of calling

his audiences "Dear souls." Laboring in Ireland, he used to say with effect, "Dear Belfast souls," "Dear Dublin souls," but when he said "Dear Cork souls" it did not seem quite so appropriate.

The sympathy of the physician is expressed, not in weeping with those who weep, but in devising relief for those who suffer in heart, or mind, or body. Far from being blunted by long contact with pain, his sympathy grows keener with each year of added experience.

The old farmer in the Gospel according to Whitcomb Riley says,

> "Doc, you 'pear so spry, jes' write me that recei't
> You have fer bein' happy by,—fer that'd shorely beat
> Your medicine," says I. And quick as scat Doc turned and writ
> And handed me, "Go he'p the sick, and put your heart in it."

The glory of optimism pervades his life. Tell him of Max Nordau's statement that our age is stamped with the stigmata of degeneration and he will laugh you to scorn. In his world he knows that this is not true, and he has no manner of doubt but that

> "Love lights more fires than hate extinguishes,
> And men grow better as the world grows old."

Into every sickroom he carries the inspiration of a cheery, hopeful presence. Fortunately he finds lots and lots of the kindliest humor even in that world of pain and sickness in which he dwells. He is apt to believe that if the good Lord had not meant we should be mirthful, He would never let so many funny things happen. Father Faber once said, "There is no greater help to a religious life than a keen sense of the ludicrous." Such a divine gift softens the asperities of life and lessens the annoyances of practice. As anatomists you know how close to the fountain of tears are to be found the ripples of laughter that run around the eyes. So sorrow and mirth go close linked all through life. A messenger calls when he is out and says, "I got some medishin from the Doctor, and I want to insult him about it." Is it a case of sciatica? The old man says that "a ball of hot wind keeps running from his hinch to his hock." And the Irish woman who wishes to save his feelings and cannot report improvement, says, "Doctor, I have given little Patsy all your medicine, and he is no worse thin."

Night-calls and bad roads have long been recognized as chief factors in a country doctor's misery. When worn out and half sick, a call at bedtime or later comes with a sense of personal affront, and its bearer is looked upon as one far gone from original righteousness. Whitcomb Riley knew of this when he wrote:

> "May be dead of winter,—makes no odds to Doc,
> He's got to face the weather ef it takes the hide off,
> 'Cause he'll not lie out of goin' and P'etend he's sick hisse'f like some
> 'At I could name 'at folks might send for and they'd never come,"

We know (but others do not) that the really necessary calls that a physician receives would hardly suffice to keep up his horses. Besides that, it is the dead beats who are most imperative, and most untimely in their calls, and who take care to know nothing of the symptoms, lest medicine be sent and the visit be deferred until the morning. You are wanted "Just as quick as you can get there," and when you do get there the "black diphthery" is a follicular tonsillitis, or the "erysipelas" is a nettle rash. There was a prophet in the land of Uz who sat patient and self-poised as the messengers with evil tidings came to him thick and fast. Either we are not his lineal descendants, or this old patriarch failed to transmit to us the secret of his calm philosophy. When such calls come, the country doctor does not always appear to the best advantage before his family, as he starts out on the road. But starlight, and let me whisper, a quiet smoke, are capital sedatives, and long before the patient's house is reached, the ruffled temper is smooth again, and the instinct of helpfulness dominates him.

If the Litany could be lengthened to read

"From country roads in spring and fall,
Good Lord, deliver us all,"

physicians might attend church more regularly, and would join with fervor in this part of the service, if in no other. Of such a highway Mark Twain once wrote that if he ever went to the place of eternal torment, he wanted to go over that road, as then he would be glad when he got to his destination! Oh, the mud, the unutterable, bottomless, clinging mud, the—the—but I cannot speak of this subject with composure. Its memories are too painful and overcome me.

Better far the drifts of winter that can only be climbed on snowshoes before being shovelled out and broken for teams, than the axle-deep and glue-like mud that sticks to my memory in dreams as it used to stick to the feet of my horses and all but pull their shoes off.

More than any other, the country doctor is a man who does his own thinking. "In this world," said the greatest of German writers, "there are few voices and many echoes." City-bred physicians lean on each other and quote precedents and authorities as glibly as lawyers do. Few men really think. Many think they are thinking, but all have opinions. You had them early in life! Your first opinion probably was that you were sorry that you had come here. Next you held, perhaps vaguely, that if dinner wasn't ready, it ought to be. I have met city physicians who reasoned about as profoundly as you did then, who would seize upon a single symptom and shut their eyes to everything else, but who have been getting along fairly well in practice. In the country they would have failed miserably. Ignorance, like crime, naturally hides in cities.

Country practice offers no *asylum ignorantium*. The doctor there goes right to the front to be known and read of all men, and what is more important, of all women. The people among whom he dwells belong to the great middle class, intelligent people, capable of forming correct judgments. Before such judges he stands, and he can shirk no responsibility since sharp eyes follow him everywhere, observing and discerning what manner of man he is. Trained by the life he leads, he gains self-reliance, presence of mind, fertility of resource and sagacity, and thus becomes a self-contained man, capable, skilful, and safe. To him a consultation is always something like a confession of failure and a downfall of pride. To this class belonged Jenner and Sims, McDowell and Robert Koch, with countless others—grand men who saw the distant tops of thought which men of common stature never see. He is charged with being at times a "routinist" and a one-idea, or a one-sided man. If he has but one idea, it is his own, and he is that much ahead of quite a few other people. Remember also that one-sided men make our only aggressive leaders. Once more, to quote from the Hoosier poet,

> "And it was given us to see beneath his rustic rind
> A native force and mastery of such inspiring kind
> That half unconsciously we made obeisance."

He may give less attention than his city brother to dress—may even at times be as unkempt as a yearling colt with the run of the burr pasture, but by intuition, that is, by the working of the unconscious mind, he grasps the essential facts that success in gaining and holding practice is less a matter of therapeutics than of tact; that the patient has a right to his whole-hearted attention, and that whenever it is at all possible, he must thoroughly understand the case and take a hopeful view of it.

Such the work. Now, what of its rewards? In ten years of hard work a very large sum can be accumulated—on one's ledger. What shall it profit a man if he has an account against every man in the country and cannot collect a cent? For your encouragement, let me tell you that from 75 to 90 per cent. of money earned in the country is good, or will be some day—after threshing, perhaps, or in the spring. While with health a modest competency is assured, there is absolute security from any sudden attack of affluence.

But there are rewards which come in daily and are not to be expressed with the dollar sign before them.

> "A poor man served by thee shall make thee rich;
> A sick man helped by thee shall make thee strong;
> Thou shalt be helped by every sense of service which thou renderest."

It may be yours to feel the happiness of the patriarch of old. "The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy."

Having tried to outline the campaign of this undecorated soldier from the time when first the *Reveille* aroused him to action, now, before the bugle note of the last call "Lights Out!" is heard, let us ask as to his final reward. Our question goes to those who have attained the prize. List while they speak:

"In life's uneven road
Our willing hands have eased our brother's load;
One forehead smoothed, one pang of torture less,
One peaceful hour a sufferer's couch to bless;
The smile brought back to fever's parching lips,
The light restored to reason in eclipse,
Life's treasure rescued like a burning brand
Snatched from the dread destroyer's wasteful hand—

"Such were our simple records, day by day
For gains like these we wore our lives away.
In toilsome paths our daily bread we sought,
But bread from heaven attending angels brought.
Pain was our teacher speaking to the heart,
Mother of pity, nurse of pitying art;
Our lesson learned, we reached the peaceful shore
Where the pale sufferer asks our aid no more—
These gracious words our welcome, our reward—
'Ye served your brothers, ye have served your Lord.' "

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